

Florentino Rodao, *Españoles en Siam (1540-1939); Una aportación al estudio de la presencia hispana en Asia Oriental*. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1997, xix + 206 pp. [Biblioteca de Historia 32.] ISBN 84.00.07634.6.

PETER BOOMGAARD

In 1897 the king of Siam (now Thailand), Rama V Chulalongkorn, visited various European countries. In Russia the centennial of the king's visit was celebrated in July 1997, culminating in the exact reconstruction of the dinner given by Czar Nicolas II in honour of Chulalongkorn. In Spain, also visited by the king in 1897, there were, to my knowledge, no festivities. Instead, a book was published on the Spaniards in Siam from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, but this seems to have been a coincidence.

The book opens with a bang and ends with a long-drawn-out whimper. The first two of the four chapters, in fact, offer more than the title of the book suggests. As Spain and Portugal were united under one crown between 1580 and 1640, the author has decided to throw in a fair amount of information on the Portuguese and their empire in Asia as well. Moreover, the involvement of the Spaniards in the affairs of Siam is not only presented against the background of the Spanish Empire of that period, particularly the links between Spain, Mexico, and the Philippines, but also positioned amidst the the power-struggles between 'Burma' (Arakan, Ava, Pegu), Malay states such as Patani and Ligor, Siam, Cambodia, Laos, Champa, Cochinchina, and Tonkin.

During the second half of the sixteenth century the Spaniards cherished hopes of conquering parts of continental Asia, among which figured China and Siam, and individual Spaniards took part in wars between the above-mentioned states. By the seventeenth century, when it had become clear that hopes of territorial conquest outside the Philippines were not realistic, the Spaniards limited themselves to more peaceful, predominantly commercial relations. They were interested in rice for consumption in *the Philippines*, *teak for shipbuilding*, and *products such as sappanwood, benzoin, and tin*. These were shipped in the annual Manila Galleon from the Philippines to Acapulco, Mexico, and then sent on to Spain. Silver coins, the only 'commodity' of the Spaniards which the Siamese were interested in, came back from Mexico in return. For a number of reasons the commercial (and missionary) contacts between Spaniards and Siamese became less important after 1688, although various attempts were made to revive them.

Chapters three and four describe, more than anything else, the paucity of relations between Spain and Siam in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In 1821, where chapter three begins, Spain had lost Mexico and the Manila Galleon trade no longer existed. To be sure, the Spaniards were

still interested in the rice and timber of Siam. They also wanted to use coolies from Siam for the sugar plantations of one of their few remaining colonies, Cuba. Nevertheless, commercial and political contacts did not amount to much, and Chulalongkorn's visit to Spain was an exceptional event. They would amount to even less when, at the end of the nineteenth century, Spain lost both Cuba and the Philippines. This last episode is dealt with in chapter four. Personally, I query the wisdom of dedicating so much space, an entire chapter, to the description of something that hardly existed. I have to admit, though, that Rodao certainly knows how to present astonishing and amusing stories illustrating the two countries' almost total lack of interest in each other.

To me, the value of the book lies in the first two chapters. It could be argued, though, that the fascination with Siam started in the nineteenth century, which therefore had to be included. Apparently Siam, the only Southeast Asian country that remained independent throughout the period of colonialism, continues to capture the imagination of Westerners. After the British, the Dutch, the French, and the Portuguese in Siam, we now have the Spaniards in Siam: everyone his own 'The King and I'.

Winarsih Partaningrat Arifin, *Babad Sembar; Chroniques de l'est javanais*. Paris: Presses de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient, 1995, 149 pp. [EFEO monographie 177.] ISBN 2.85539.777.4.

HANS HÄGERDAL

In spite of the best efforts of Brandes and Pigeaud, the easternmost part of Java, Blambangan, has received relatively scant interest from serious historians. This area, once the seat of Java's last Hindu polity, underwent dramatic upheavals in the early modern period, upheavals which, to a large degree, have abrogated chronicular traditions and complicated the task of historical reconstruction. It is therefore the more welcome that Arifin has ventured into this scarcely-trodden field of study.

Babad Sembar is a text dating from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century and dealing with various episodes from East Javanese history. It contains 365 strophes, ending abruptly in the middle of a genealogic digression. It appears to have been written at the residence of Jayanagara, *bupati* of Prabalingga. The interesting question of its origins, purpose and possible legitimizing function is not neglected by Arifin. The main ambition of his monograph, however, is much more problematic: to use the text as a means of reconstructing the history of the Blambangan realm in the period between late Majapahit and the early eighteenth century.



Bijdragen

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